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ABSTRACT

The importance of education for prosperity is beyond dispute. A nation or a state whose people are educated and industrious will prosper. Such social forces as the rise of private schooling, disenchantment with public education, and the aging of the population drain public education of its support. If educational quality has a cost, the willingness to pay for education is a measure of the commitment to quality. Mississippi is near the bottom of the nation in teacher pay and spending per student. Such statistics mean the state will find it difficult to keep its most capable citizens, to attract the best qualified to move there, and to attract industries that require well qualified workers. Mississippi's agrarianism hindered economic progress and the development of new industries while its plantation economy left a legacy of low educational attainment and high infant mortality. Iowa, a state with a somewhat similar agriculturally based economy, performs better overall in education and spends much more on teacher salaries and higher education. Meaningful growth will not occur in the absence of an educated population. States and nations that fail to invest in education do so at their own risk. (SG)

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Social Research Report Series 93-1

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Education and Vicious Circles in Mississippi

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This report contains data generated as part of the Mississippi Agricultural and Forestry Experiment Station research program. Joint sponsorship by the organizations listed in the Foreword on page iii is gratefully acknowledged.

Trade names of commercial products used in this report are included only for clarity and understanding. All available names (i.e., trade names, experimental product code names or numbers, chemical names, etc.) appear in Appendix B of this report.

Tolerance or exemption from tolerance has not been established for all uses of pesticides reported herein. Pesticides were used in accordance with EPA Experimental Use Regulations [40 CFR 172.3 (a, c); Section 5 of FIFRA]. Except for samples taken for future experimentation and/or analyses, all other quantities of rice produced as a result of this research project were destroyed.

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Education and Vicious Circles in Mississippi

WORK FORCE SKILLS LAG IN THE SOUTHEAST, DESPITE REFORMS. The region is beset by high illiteracy and school dropout rates. Southeast states still graduate only 67% of high schoolers compared with 71% for the whole U.S. Yet retraining and educational improvement efforts are spotty and poorly funded. Bell-South finds 'the overwhelming majority" of job aspirants flunk entry-level tests. Over a third of college freshmen take remedial reading, writing or math, according to the Southern Regional Education Board. "Plants that modernize have to go back and teach basic math says Southern Technology Council Director Stuart Rosenfeld, adding: "People don't understand fractions, let alone statistical process control." "Low skills are our Achilles heel," says George Autry, head of MDC, Inc., a Chapel Hill, N. C. think tank. –*The Wall Street Journal*, February 18, 1992, page one.

The importance of education for prosperity is beyond dispute. The citizens of a nation of illiterates cannot possibly have the comforts and conveniences enjoyed by a highly educated population. Nor will their nation have the influence in world affairs of one whose citizens have learned the skills required of the members of an industrial society.

The present and the future, of the individual and the collectivity, are intimately tied to the qualities people have. Will they be prosperous, enjoy good health, adequate diets, and satisfactory housing? Will their children have good schools and medical care, or will they be poor and miserable?

A nation or a state whose people are educated and industrious will prosper. Natural resources, often cited as the basis of affluence and the hope for the future of given areas, are only incidental. Switzerland and Japan have virtually no natural resources; yet they are among the most prosperous of nations. Their prosperity is derived from the caliber of their peoples rather than from good farmland, petroleum deposits or gold mines of which they have little or none. Wealth is created by capable minds and skilled hands. These are the result of being educated. It is from this perspective that this publication examines education in Mississippi.

Social Forces Affecting Public Education

In America and in Mississippi, public education is buffeted by social forces that drain it of support. The rise of private schooling, disenchantment with public education, and the aging of the population, together conspire to reduce support for public schools. This increases disaffection with them and further erodes support. Universal public education of high quality, once regarded as one of the prime American achievements, is now viewed quite differently.

Private Schools

Private schooling gained favor in Mississippi, as it did elsewhere, in the wake of court-mandated joint attendance of black and white students in public schools. In 1966, just over 3% of Mississippi's students attended nonpublic institutions. By 1989, this proportion had risen to more than 11%, a relative increase of more than 240% (Table 1). Not all nonpublic schools, notably parochial schools, deny admission to black students, but most do. That private school enrollment increased three-fold while public school enrollment dropped by 15% in the wake of Brown v. the Board of Education is due mainly to this. How does this trend affect education in the state?

It is reasonable to assume that parents of private school students are less likely than the parents of public school students to vote for taxes to pay for public schools. Given this assumption, two consequences follow.

In Mississippi, a 60% majority is required for the approval of tax-based funding measures. Parents of private school students are generally better educated and more affluent than parents of public school students and more likely to vote in elections, thus being over-represented in proportion to their number. When the margin of approval or defeat of school funding initiatives is small, as often happens, negative votes from even a fraction of the parents of private school students can result in defeat. These are the parents who, were their children attending public schools, would be most likely to support public schools actively and vote for increased taxes.

Table 1. Enrollment in nonpublic and public schools and percent of total enrollment that is nonpublic. Mississippi, 1966-1967 to 1989-1990.

Year[a]	Nonpublic enrollment	Fall enrollment	Total enrollment	Percent nonpublic
1966-1967	20,004	590,931[b]	610,935	3.2
1967-1968	22,736	591,958[b]	614,694	3.7
1968-1969	24,119	594,548[b]	618,667	3.9
1969-1970	46,981	575,284	622,256	7.5
1970-1971	65,707	534,411	600,118	10.9
1971-1972	66,667	529,328	595,995	11.2
1972-1973	N.A.	526,344	N.A.	N.A.
1973-1974	65,107	520,179	585,286	11.1
1979-1980	69,290	484,784	554,074	12.5
1989-1990	62,712	502,020	564,732	11.1

Sources: Derived from the following: 1967-1974 from Mississippi State Department of Education, *Statistical Data*, Jackson, MS, for the years stated. 1979-1980 estimated from 1980 Census of Population, *General Social and Economic Characteristics, Mississippi*, Table 66, Washington, DC, 1982. 1989-1990, from Management Information Systems Bureau, *Public School Enrollment, 1990-1991, End of First Month*, Jackson, MS, State Department of Education, 1991; and Center for Population Studies, *Mississippi Profiles: 1990 Census Data*, Oxford, MS, University of Mississippi, 1991.

[a] Nonpublic school enrollment data for years after 1973-1974 are not available except for census years.

[b] Estimated.

N.A., Not available.

When local revenues are insufficient to fund public schools adequately and school funding measures are defeated at the polls because of opposition from parents of private school students, and state government makes up the difference, the taxpayers of the state subsidize private schools indirectly. If there is not enough money for public schools because of the presence of private schools, and the shortage is not made up by the state, then public school students are penalized by the presence of private schools. It is also true that private schools decrease the financial needs of public school systems by removing students from them. This, however, does not compensate for the possible loss of tax revenues.

Private schools have consequences for public schools in yet another way. The parents of private school students do not participate in the affairs of the public schools through parent and teacher organizations nor support the public schools in other ways or through other school-related activities. Public schools are thus deprived of the talents and energies of a group that is able to contribute to the quality of public education in their communities. Instead, the energies of this group are directed to the private schools that their children attend.

However, desegregation is not now necessarily the principal reason behind the growth of private school education. Many parents believe that the quality of education provided by private schools is superior to that provided by public ones. The proliferation of privately supported schooling partly reflects this fact. Parochial schools, preparatory schools, home schooling, and for-profit schools have all benefitted. President Benno Schmidt of Yale University resigned his position in May 1992 to head a company that plans to build 1,000 private, profit-making "Edison' schools across the United States.

Disenchantment with Public Education

Are schools effective? Are children being well taught? If so, is this reflected in their ability to function adequately in our society? Are public monies being well spent on the education of the young?

Today, few Americans agree with these statements. Schools are widely thought to have failed to meet their responsibility to train students to be productive. In a recent Louis Harris poll only 40% or fewer of the respondents gave schools high marks (Table 2). The poll revealed that a majority of 60% or more believe that schools are not doing a satisfactory job of teaching students to read, write, and reason; of training students to understand science, math and technology; of teaching students to communicate well and work successfully with others; of teaching the skills needed for holding a job or solving complex problems. In short, they believe that schools are turning out intellectual incompetents.

At the same time, 87% of adult Americans agree with the statement that competition from abroad is serious for U.S. business (Harris, 1992:16). The perceived failure of schools to train students to be productive citizens is blamed by many for the decline in income and economic well-being, and the inability to compete internationally. Since schools are thought to be ineffective, the personnel that work in them are

Table 2. National opinion on the effectiveness of schools.

Question	Percent Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory
How would you rate the job the schools of this country are doing in teaching students:		
– to read, write, and reason well?	36	64
– to really understand math, science, and technology, and be able to use what they know?	27	67
– to learn to communicate well and work successfully with other people?	40	60
– to learn skills needed to hold down a job?	30	68
– to learn to solve complex problems?	22	76

Source: Derived from data in Louis Harris, "The Public Takes Reform to Heart." *Agenda*, Vol. 2, No. 1, Winter 1992. pp. 15-21.

often regarded as overpaid and self-indulgent[1]. Although our social and economic condition has many causes, teachers are held accountable. Situations that are believed to be real have real consequences. The Mississippi legislature recently enacted a tax increase to fund schools, but not the salaries of teachers.

An Aging Population

The aging of the population is the most potent social force that militates against public schooling. When the proportion of the population that is young is declining and the proportion that is old is growing, public services of all kinds that serve the needs of the young lose support.

The number of persons in Mississippi who are elderly, as well as the fraction that they constitute of the state's population, is increasing. The proportion of Mississippi's population that was 65 or older grew from 10% in 1970 to 12.5% in 1990.

Nationally, 12.5% of the population is over 64 years old. However, the 65-and-over group is a larger percentage of those of voting age, which excludes persons under 18. Consequently, the 65and-over group accounted for 16.1% of the population that was eligible to vote in 1988. They cast 19.4% of the votes in that election (Table 3).

The young are more numerous than the elderly. However, their voting strength is diluted by smaller proportions registered to vote and by smaller proportions of those registered casting a ballot. The elderly, who behave in ways opposite to this, have their voting strength enlarged as a result. In the 1988 presidential election, for instance, although the age group 20-24 years old held 10.3% of eligible voters, it accounted for 7.8% of registered voters and cast only 6.8% of the vote. Yet the 65-and-over age group held 16.1% of eligible voters, 19% of registered voters, and cast 19.4% of all votes. While 27.8% of the younger group voted, 67.5% of the older group did so (Table 3).

The under-representation of young voters at the polls is especially acute in congressional election years. In the November 1990 congressional election, 29.1% of the electorate aged 25-29 voted, while 64.1% of those 65-74 did so (Table 4). In the presidential election year of 1988, 43.7% of those aged 25-29 and 73.0% of those aged 65-74 cast ballots (Table 3).

The higher proportion of older persons voting, combined with an increase over time in their share of the electorate, results in an ever larger fraction of votes being cast by them. Because the elderly vote more consistently than the young, their share of the total votes cast goes up in congressional election years. In the 1990 congressional election, 22% of all votes were cast by persons 65 or more years old, while in the 1988 presidential election, the corresponding number was 19.4 (Tables 3 and 4).

In every presidential election since 1964, more than 60% of voters aged 65 or more cast votes. In 1988, nearly 70% did so. The elderly's share of the total vote has increased steadily since 1964. In the election held in November 1988, just under 20% of all votes were cast by them, up from 14.9% in 1964 (Table 5). There is no reason to suppose that voter participation by age in Mississippi is significantly different.

Table 3. Voting behavior by age, presidential election of 1988.

Age	Percent of age group voting	Percent of eligible voters in age group	Percent of registered voters in age group	Percent of votes cast
All ages				
18 and over	57.4	100.0	100.0	100.0
18 and 19	32.2	4.1	2.6	2.3
20-24	37.8	10.3	7.8	6.8
25-29	43.7	11.9	9.7	9.1
30-34	52.2	12.1	11.1	11.0
35-44	61.2	19.8	20.6	21.1
45-54	66.6	13.6	15.2	15.8
55-64	69.3	12.1	14.0	14.6
65 and over	67.5	16.1	19.0	19.4
65-74	73.0	9.8	12.0	12.6
75 and over	66.2	6.3	7.0	6.8

Source: Derived from data in U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Reports, Series P-20, 440, *Voting and Registration in the Election of November 1988*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, October 1989.

Table 4. Voting behavior by age, congressional election of 1990.

Age	Percent of age group voting	Percent of registered voters in age group	Percent of votes cast
All ages	45.0	100.0	100.0
18 and 19	18.8	2.0	1.5
20-24	21.7	6.8	4.7
25-29	29.1	8.7	7.3
30-34	38.2	10.9	10.3
35-44	48.4	21.9	22.4
45-54	53.2	15.8	16.6
55-64	58.9	13.8	15.3
65 and over	60.2	20.2	22.0
65-74	64.1	12.5	14.2
75-84	76.1	6.4	6.7
85 and over	63.6	1.3	1.1

Source: Derived from data in U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Reports, Series P-20, 453, *Voting and Registration in the Election of November 1990*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, October 1991.

[1] In an article titled "Beggars in Tuxedos," *Forbes* magazine accused university professors of drawing six-figure salaries while working 5 hours a week (Sowell, 1992).

Table 5. Percent of the population 65 or more years old voting in presidential elections and percent of votes cast, United States, 1964-1988.

Year	Percent voting	Percent of votes
1964	66.3	14.9
1968	65.8	15.4
1972	63.5	14.9
1976	62.2	15.6
1980	65.1	16.8
1984	67.7	17.7
1988	69.2	19.5

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Reports, Series P-20, No. 440, *Voting and Registration in the Election of 1988*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1989. Tables 1 and A-4.

It is likely that in local elections, the participation of the young is even more dispirited than in congressional elections and that the disparity between the proportion voting that is young and that is old is even greater. These are the elections in which local funding for public education is decided.

While not voting as a block, the elderly, no less than other groups, will vote to promote their self-interests. Associations composed primarily of elderly members have grown substantially. The largest of these engage in lobbying Congress. Among them are the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) that claims 25 million members, up from 16 million in 1984 (AARP, 1987:13); the National Council of Senior Citizens with 4 million members; the National Alliance of Senior Citizens, 770,000 members; and the National Association of Retired Federal Employees, which counts 490,000 members. The combined membership of these organizations alone is more than 30 million although, of course, there is some overlapping. There are, in addition, a dozen or more other sizeable groups devoted to the interests of the elderly population (Gale Research, 1985). Membership in organizations devoted to promoting the interests of other segments of society (minority groups and trade unions, for example) pales by comparison.

Many of these associations, particularly the AARP, intend to influence public policy on behalf of the elderly. In 1982, a political action committee named SENIORPAC, sponsored by the AARP, was formed. It backed 41 candidates for Congress in the 1982 election. Of these, 24 were elected. SENIORPAC has also successfully backed candidates for state offices (Anderson, 1983:9).

The Near Elderly

The population aged 55-64 is 10 or fewer years away from being eligible for entitlements earmarked for the elderly, principally Social Security and Medicare payments. Their interests lie with those of the 65-and-over age group, a fact recognized by the American Association of Retired Persons that admits as members individuals who are 50 or more years of age. Not only are they at the threshold of elderly status, they have parents who have crossed it while their children have long since left the public schools and are no longer dependent on parental support.

If their share of the votes is added to that of the 65 and over voters, then 34% of votes cast in the 1988 presidential election and 37.3% of those cast in the 1988 congressional elections were cast by the elderly or near-elderly (Table 6). In 2030, assuming that 60% of the electorate as a whole votes, and that 70% of the electorate 55 and over does so, 48% of all votes will be cast by the elderly and near elderly, and 32% by the elderly alone.

A national survey conducted in 1978 by Louis Harris and Associates for the Department of Housing and Urban Development, revealed the following attitudes as expressed by respondents who were 25-34 years old and by those who were 65 or more years old. When selecting the public services they would most like to see improved in the community, 20% of the young picked public schools while only 6% of the elderly did so. Forty-one percent of the young but only 7% of the elderly would consider moving if the quality of public schools worsened (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, n.d.).

While the elderly do not vote as a block, no less than other groups their votes will reflect their self-interest. The number and proportion of the elderly in the population are growing. They are banding into organizations to promote their cause. This translates into increased support for social security payments, medicare, homestead exemptions, age-based pre-tax deductions from income, and other services that benefit the elderly and reduced support for student

Table 6. Voting behavior by age, presidential election of 1988 and congressional election of 1990.

	1988		1990	
Age	Percent of voters in age group	Percent of votes cast	Percent of voters in age group	Percent of votes cast
All ages	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
18-34	38.4	29.2	28.4	23.8
35-54	33.4	36.9	37.7	39.0
55 +	28.2	34.0	34.0	37.3

Source: Derived from data in: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Reports, Series P-20, 440, *Voting and Registration in the Election of November 1988*, and Series P-20, 453, *Voting and Registration in the Election of November 1990*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, October 1989 and October 1991. Table 1.

loans, day care centers, aid to families with dependent children, public recreational facilities, and, of course, public schools.

Schools, Society, and Equality in Education

Schools mirror society. Is the society segregated by race? The schools are segregated by race. Is the society segregated by sex? The schools are segregated by sex. Is the society composed of a small privileged elite and of others who do not share their advantages? There will be schools for the elite and schools for the rest. Does the society believe that religion is the concern of the state and should be supported by it? Schools will be guided by the tenets of the official religion. Does the society support capitalistic principles of economic organization? The schools will train students to be loyal and efficient workers and to value competition.

The United States is no different in this regard from any other society. To understand a society, study its schools. There, the values cherished by its people and the way its citizens are distributed according to privilege will be revealed.

As individual Americans and as a society, we value equality and fair play. We assert this value in the federal constitution and in laws that we have enacted. Individually, we express displeasure with others when they are perceived to be making use of an unfair advantage. Does education reflect this value?

Equality in human affairs has never been easily achieved, if at all. When is there equality? When all have the same of whatever is desired? When all have the same measure of undesirable circumstances? When all have the same opportunity to obtain that which is valued? If so, how is opportunity to be defined?

With regard to education, one view is that equality will be achieved when schools are equal; when teachers are paid the same salaries, and are comparably trained; when physical facilities, laboratories, and libraries are equivalent; when the same instruction is available to all students. In other words, equal personnel, facilities, and programs. In addition, schools must be accessible to all, must admit all who are qualified to attend, and such qualifications must not discriminate between groups of students.

If these conditions are met, will equality of opportunity exist? For instance, do students who live in comfortable surroundings have the same opportunity to learn as those who live in poor surroundings and experience difficulty studying at home?

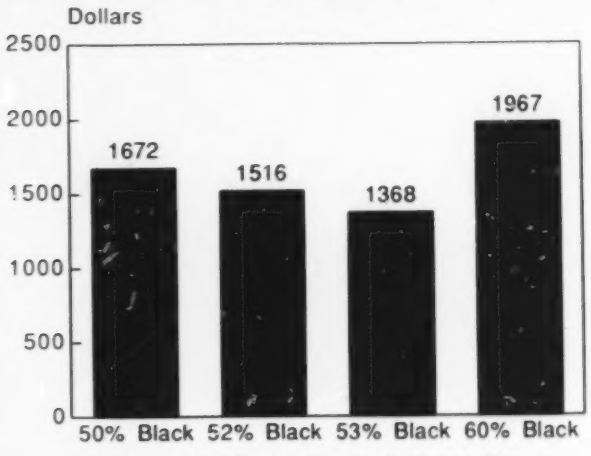
Equality – meaning equal facilities, programs, personnel, and unbiased admission – can be achieved. It is impossible to achieve equality of opportunity when personal, social, and economic circumstances outside the school are meant. This is not only because some students may be inherently more intelligent but, mainly because family background and personal circumstances vary widely, favoring some while handicapping others. The circumstance found in study after study to be the best predictor of the academic success of students is the economic and social status of their parents. While public policy can ensure the equality of schools in a narrow sense, it cannot ensure equality of opportunity, broadly conceived, to benefit from schooling. Skin color is not the question. Children, whether black or white, who grow up in affluent middle-class families, do well in school. Conversely, poor children do less well regardless of color.

A measure of equality of funding as it might be affected by the relative number of black or of white students in the school is what I call "extra effort." It is the amount spent per student over and above classroom teachers' salaries excluding transportation expense. The extra effort measure thus includes administrative salaries, salaries of librarians and other support personnel, the expense of supplies and equipment, the cafeteria, and other services.

This measure was calculated for each of Mississippi's 152 school districts. School districts were then divided into fourths or quartiles. The first quartile includes districts with the highest extra effort amounts spent per student, the second quartile the districts with the next highest effort amounts down to the fourth quartile, which has the smallest extra effort amounts spent per student. The percent of enrollment that is black was then calculated for each quartile. The result is shown in Figure 1. There are differences in the amounts spent. The average extra effort amount spent in school districts in the first quartile was $1,967 while in districts in the lowest quartile, $1,368 was spent on average. However, these differences are unrelated to the proportion of the enrollment that is black. School districts with the highest black enrollment (60%) were in the first quartile (high) of extra effort money, the third and fourth quartiles were 52 and 53% black, and the second quartile, 50% black. By this measure, black and white students are equally served.

Equality can also be viewed in terms of outcomes. The equality of outcome in Mississippi as measured by the median number of years of school completed by both blacks and whites has increased since 1940. Both groups have experienced significant increases in years of school completed, whites moving from 8.9 to 12.4 and blacks from 4.7 to 9.4. The number of median years of schooling of the black population is now much closer to that of the white. While in 1940, the difference in number of years of schooling between

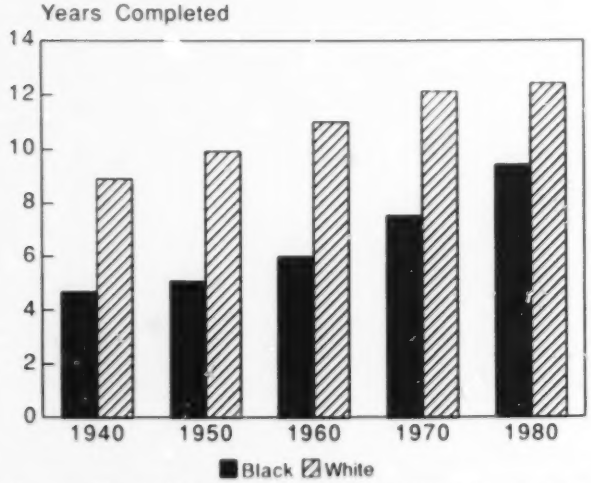
Figure 1. "Extra effort" quartiles in relation to percent of students who are black, Mississippi, 1989.



Source: *Annual Report of the State Superintendent of Public Education* 1991. Jackson, MS: State Department of Education, 1991.

black and white was 4.2, in 1980, it was 3.0 (Figure 2). More significantly, the black-white ratio in the number of years completed declined from 1.9 in 1940 and 1950 to 1.3 in 1980, meaning that whites had completed nearly twice as many years as blacks in those years, but only one-third more in 1980.

Figure 2. Median years of school completed by race, Mississippi, 1940-1980.



Source: 1940 and 1950, 1950 Census of Population, *Characteristics of the Population, Mississippi*, Table 20, Washington, DC: 1952. 1960 and 1970, 1970 Census of Population *General Social and Economic Characteristics, Mississippi*, Table 46, Washington, DC: 1972. 1980, 1980 Census of Population, *General Social and Economic Characteristics, Mississippi*, Table 76, Washington, DC: 1982. **Note:** "Black" includes a small number of persons who are Asian American, American Indian, etc.

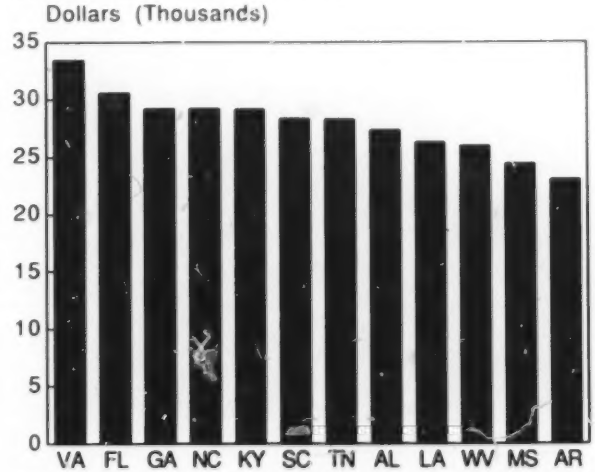
The Money Factor

If quality costs, then our willingness to pay for education is an indication of our commitment to quality. Although research has shown that the students' socioeconomic background – reflected by the income, occupation, and education of parents – is the most important factor in school performance, it has also been demonstrated that teachers make a difference. Teachers whose verbal skills, for example, are high have students who learn more than do teachers whose command of English is relatively poor. Teaching is labor intensive. Commitment to education as reflected by spending is largely a matter of teachers' salaries. Average teachers' salaries in the Southeast are displayed in Figure 3.

Mississippi can once again thank Arkansas for not being last. Only Arkansas is below Mississippi among the Southeastern states in the amount it pays teachers. Virginia, at the head of the class, pays an average salary of $33,382, which is 37% more than Mississippi's $24,366. Assuming average salaries, a Mississippi public school teacher can earn an extra $4,000, or 16% more by commuting from Corinth to Selmer, Tennessee, 20 miles, or an additional $3,000 by driving daily from Meridian to York, Alabama, about 25 miles. Mississippi is a happy hunting ground for recruiters hiring school teachers to work in other states of the Southeast.

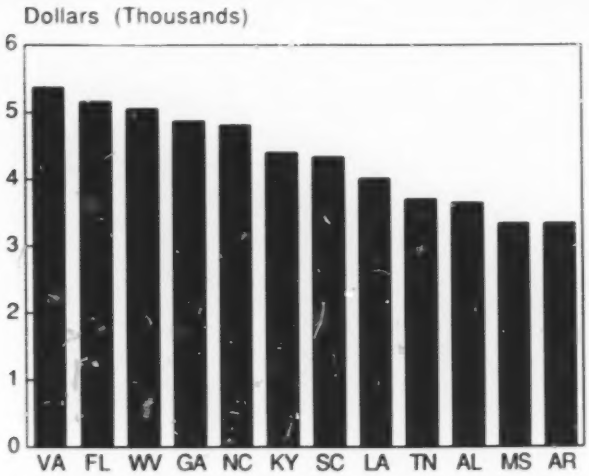
Mississippi and Arkansas are both at the bottom in

Figure 3. Average salary of classroom teachers, Southeastern states, 1990-1991.



Source: Research Division, National Education Association of the United States, cited in *Annual Report of the State Superintendent of Public Education, 1992*. Jackson, MS: State Department of Education, January 1992, p. 36. **Note:** Except for Mississippi, data are estimates made by the National Education Association.

Figure 4. Expenditures per pupil, Southeastern states, 1990-1991.



Source: Research Division, National Education Association of the United States, cited in *Annual Report of the State Superintendent of Public Education, 1992*. Jackson, MS: State Department of Education, January 1992, p. 36. **Note**: Except for Mississippi, data are estimates made by the National Education Association.

expenditure per pupil (Figure 4). Per pupil expenditure is strongly influenced by salaries that make up the bulk of the measure. The disparity in this amount between Mississippi and Virginia is even more striking. Virginia spends $5,360 per pupil, 61% more than Mississippi's $3,337.

The compensation of classroom teachers in Mississippi (administrators and ancillary personnel such as librarians are excluded) rose steadily, in real terms, from 1950 to the early 1970's (Figure 5). It then remained stagnant until 1978, when a decline set in that lasted until 1985. A new drop in real income occurred in 1990, as salaries remained constant while inflation took its toll. The secular trend has been upward, as teachers as well as other segments of Mississippi's population benefitted from the increased prosperity that the United States enjoyed following World War II.

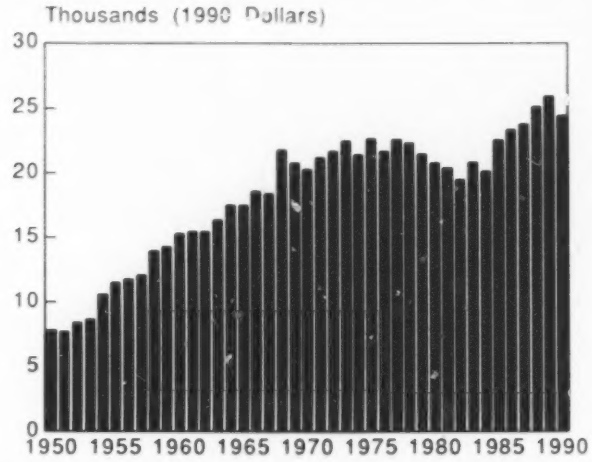
Expenditures per pupil in Mississippi have also increased in real terms over time. However, they have done so more rapidly and more consistently than salaries (Figure 6). It appears that the state's government and taxpayers have been more willing to fund cafeterias, playing fields, equipment, and the like than teachers.

The difference is illustrated in Figure 7. Between 1972 and 1986, expenditure per pupil rose 39% in real terms, teachers' salaries, 8%. During this same time, personal income per capita increased by 16%, double the rate of change in teachers' salaries. Gross State Product, a measure of the total wealth created in the state, expanded 23%.[2]

The relative unattractiveness of public school teaching is reflected in the long run decline from 1979-1980

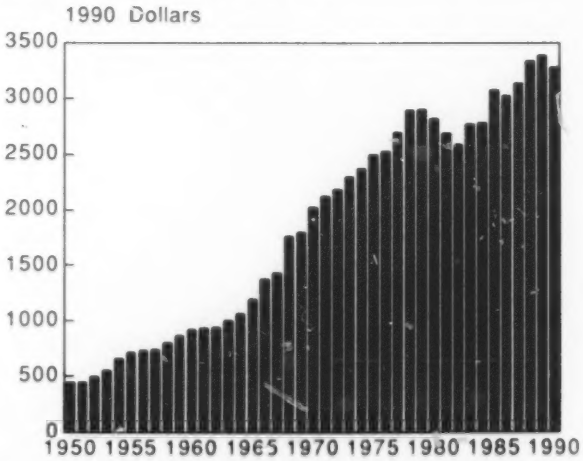
[2] The gross state product is the gross market value of the goods and services attributable to labor and property located in the state. The numbers on which this figure is based have been adjusted for inflation to 1990 dollars.

Figure 5. Average salary of classroom teachers, Mississippi, 1950-1951 to 1990-1991.



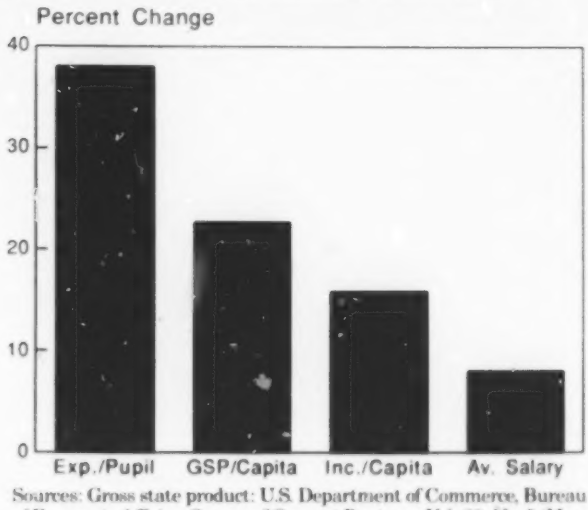
Source: *Annual Report of the State Superintendent of Public Education*, Jackson, MS: State Department of Education, 1950-1951 through 1991-1992.

Figure 6. Expenditures per public school pupil, Mississippi, 1950-1951 to 1990-1991.



Source: *Annual Report of the State Superintendent of Public Education*, Jackson, MS: State Department of Education, 1950-1951 through 1991-1992.

Figure 7. Percent change in selected economic and educational measures, Mississippi, 1972-1986.



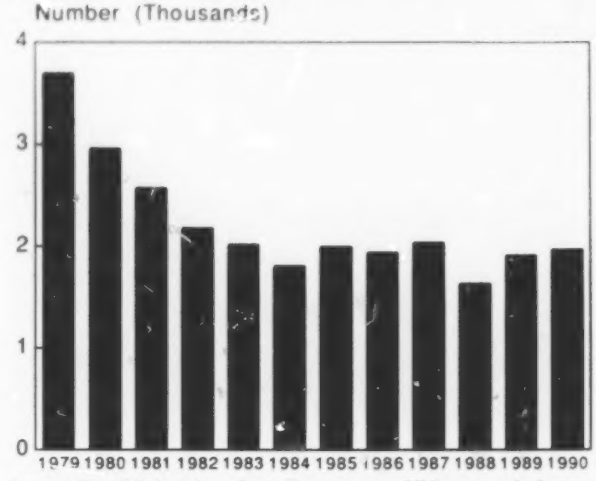
Sources: Gross state product: U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Economic Affairs, *Survey of Current Business*, Vol. 68, No. 5 (May, 1988), Table 1. Classroom teachers' salaries: State Department of Education, *Annual Report of the State Superintendent of Education*, Jackson: 1989, p. 21. Per capita personal income: Frnka, Robert L., *Mississippi Personal Income, Selected Years, 1970-1975*, College of Business and Industry, Mississippi State University, 1977, p. 9. Frnka, Robert L., et al, *Mississippi Personal Income, Selected Years, 1976-1981*. Mississippi State University, College of Business and Industry, 1983, p. 9. Mississippi State University, College of Business and Industry, *Mississippi Statistical Abstract, 1989*, p. 31. Expenditures per pupil in average daily attendance: Division of Administration and Finance, *Statistical Data*, Jackson: Mississippi Department of Education, 1963-1989. State Department of Education, *Annual Report of the State Superintendent of Education*. Jackson, MS: 1980-1987. Population data: U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Census of Population*, 1970, 1980, 1990. Cost of living data: *Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1990*. Washington, DC: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1990, Table 757.

to 1990-1991 in the number of initial teaching certificates issued by the State Department of Education (Figure 8). While in 1979-1980, 3,691 certificates were awarded, in 1990-1991 the number was 1,986. Of interest, is the observation that as teachers' salaries increase so does the number of applicants for teachers' certificates. This enlarges the hiring pool and facilitates the employment of better qualified teachers. Teachers with skills such as science or mathematics that are marketable outside of the classroom can easily boost their earnings by leaving teaching, and many do.

Higher education fares no better. Once again, Mississippi is saved from being last by one, but this time it is indebted to Louisiana (Figure 9). Tennessee's expenditure per pupil in higher education soared by 67.7% from 1983 to 1986, while Mississippi's rose by a mere 5.1%. Meanwhile, inflation as reflected in the consumer price index reduced spending power by 10%.

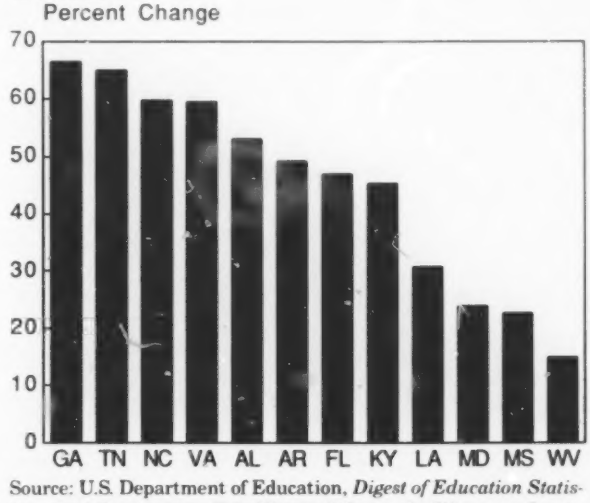
Such disparities in funding mean that the state will find it difficult to keep within its borders its most capable citizens, difficult to attract the best qualified to move here, difficult to draw enterprises whether manufacturing or service that require well-qualified workers, and difficult to rise up out of its last or next-to-last position in the Southeast and in the nation. Mississippi competes in a national environment with the other states of the union. It is failing.

Figure 8. Initial teacher certificates issued, Mississippi, 1979-1980 to 1990-1991.



Source: Unpublished data, State Department of Education, Jackson.

Figure 9. Percent change in expenditures per student enrolled in public higher education in the Southeast, 1981-1986



Source: U.S. Department of Education, *Digest of Education Statistics, 1990*. Washington, D.C.: National Center for Education Statistics, 1991, Table 175 and 296. Note: The consumer price index increased by 10% from 1983-1986.

The Legacy of The Past

The paradox of Mississippi's poverty and under development within the richest economy in the world can be explained in terms of the social and economic history of the state as it relates to the organization of agriculture.

Agrarianism, a world view and way of life born of plantation agriculture, hindered economic progress in the South and in Mississippi in a number of ways. Status, prestige, and wealth flowed from the possession of land. Human and material capital was invested in agriculture rather than in business or industry.[1]

This set of conditions gave the agricultural elite a hold on the affairs of the community and the power to block or, at least, hinder the investment of capital in nontraditional enterprises such as manufacturing plants and railroads that might have eroded the basis of their power. It gave them access to the centers of decision-making in state legislatures and county courthouses. From this vantage point, they could influence the adoption of policies that favored them and oppose those that did not, thus contributing to the perpetuation of the existing social and economic arrangements. Not least among these was the subordinate status of the black population and of poor whites; groups from which plantation agriculture drew its labor and on whom plantation society depended for survival. The innovations and the changes that modernization could have brought to the region were often spurned.

Mississippi is the state in which plantation agriculture made its greatest imprint. Within Mississippi, the Delta was the region most heavily devoted to this form of production. In that region of the state, plantation agriculture left a legacy of low educational levels, high infant mortality rates, and a population that in some counties is nearly 100% black even today.

Among the consequences of this social system is a black infant mortality rate in the Delta that is substantially higher than that of blacks in other parts of the state or the nation. In the Delta, of 1,000 black infants born, 29.2 die during the first year of life (Mississippi State Department of Health, n.d.). This rate is higher than that of Taiwan (17), Costa Rica (17), Panama (23), Yugoslavia (25), and Albania (28), to name but a few. It is virtually the same as that of Guyana (30) and Malaysia (30). (Population Reference Bureau, 1990). The fundamental causes are the same everywhere: low income, lack of education, poor housing, poor nutrition, poor sanitary conditions, poor medical care. It is not far fetched to say that the Delta is a third-world region in a first-world nation.

[1] I am indebted to Nicholls, 1960, for an extensive discussion of the influence of agrarianism on the economic growth of the South.

Agrarianism also resulted in a low value placed on education for all but the elite. It is a system that created an educated, accomplished, and wealthy upper class that had the leisure to spend in pursuit of their interests. In doing so, they contributed powerfully to the nation's cultural heritage. However, education was not considered important for the public at large, and certainly not for its black members. The undervaluing of education produced economic stagnation when measured against the progress being made elsewhere in the United States and in the South. Technological advances in manufacturing and services require ever more educated workers. The need for an increasingly better educated work force began in the mid-eighteenth century. The advent of the industrial revolution created a continuing demand for publicly funded education and for a more skilled labor force. That trend has not abated. While a few years ago, a worker with a grade school education could operate a loom, modern looms now require of operators the ability to read complex manuals so they are able to run a computer-driven machine. An automobile repairman now must be able to understand intricate instructions and use sophisticated computer-driven analyzers.

While the South and Mississippi are now fully committed to industrial and economic development, and to equality of educational opportunity, they are handicapped by the past. Education's low priority has resulted in poor economies that, in turn, find it hard to pay for an expanded and improved educational system. In Mississippi, dramatic educational reform initiatives that won it nationwide praise were legislated but have not been funded. It is estimated that 10 million new jobs could be created in the South by the year 2000, many of them in Mississippi. But half of the jobs will require some post-secondary education and one-third will require college graduates (Tapp: 1991). States with the best educated labor force will benefit most. Those with a less educated labor force will fall behind. The 1990 Census revealed that of Mississippi's population 25 or older, only 64% have finished high school, the lowest high school completion rate in the United States. For the nation at large, the completion rate is 77%.

Mississippi and Iowa: What's The Difference?

Mississippi and Iowa are similar in many respects. Both have economies in which agriculture has been dominant in the past and remains a major source of income in the present. Both have populations that are among the most rural in the nation. In fact, a great

er proportion of the white population of Mississippi than of Iowa lives in cities, although overall Iowa is somewhat more urban (Table 7). However, Iowa was settled by homesteaders and family farms have been the norm. Mississippi's economy has been heavily influenced by plantation agriculture. This difference in social and economic history has produced many contrasts between the two states.

Among the more striking are the following: Iowa's population is 1.4% black, while that of Mississippi is 35.2% black. The percentage of whites completing high school is lower in Mississippi. The proportion of whites completing college in Mississippi is slightly above the figure for Iowa. However, when the entire populations of the two states are compared, thereby including the black population in the total, the disparity in high school completion increases and the relative proportions completing college are reversed, Iowa's being higher.

The difference in median household income between the white population of the two states is just over $2,000, Iowa's being larger. However, when the total population of the states are compared, Iowa's advantage is $4,700. The same pattern persists with regard to per capita income and the proportions living below the poverty level.

There are also significant disparities in the amounts spent for education. Iowa's expenditure per student enrolled in higher education is 34% higher than Mississippi's. It spends 18% more on teacher's salaries.

The Moral of the Story: Opportunity, Quality, and Funding

The low levels of educational attainment and the poverty of many black and white members of the population have an effect on all. Low educational levels mean an unskilled labor force. Manufacturing enterprises that require skilled labor and are willing to pay high wages for it will look elsewhere. Instead, inducements such as free land and utilities and a moratorium on taxes that are used to attract industry often bring in predatory marginal operations that use unskilled labor, pay low wages, and move elsewhere as soon as soon as conditions warrant. Much more importantly, low educational levels also mean that there is, in Mississippi, a much smaller pool of potential entrepreneurial talent that might create new homegrown enterprises and relatively few skilled workers to be employed by them.

If Mississippi's black population had the same educational, occupational, and income levels as the white, Mississippi would rise significantly in the rankings of the states. This is in no way to argue that blacks are the cause of the relative economic and social backwardness of Mississippi. To do so would be to blame the victim. Rather, if the state's economic and social levels are to be raised, conditions that enable its black citizens to benefit as much from membership in the society as do white citizens, must be created. Enlarged educational opportunities must exist for all, black and white. This will not happen soon, nor will it be done easily. The welfare of both groups and the economic future of the state are at stake.

Many solutions have been offered for improving the quality of education and raising the abilities of students. Head Start and other catch-up programs have shown their value. More schooling translated into longer school days and a longer school year also have promise. The United States has the shortest school year by far of any industrialized nation. If students learn in school, and surely they do, then the more school days the more learning. If in addition, better

Table 7. Selected characteristics of the white and total populations of Mississippi and of Iowa, 1980.

	Total population		White population	
Characteristic	**Mississippi**	**Iowa**	**Mississippi**	**Iowa**
Percent completing high school[a]	54.8	71.5	63.9	70.3
Percent completing college[b]	12.3	13.9	14.4	13.9
Median household income	$12,096	$16,799	$14.786	$16,880
Per capita income of persons in households	$ 5,983	$ 7,294	$ 6,583	$ 7,349
Percent of families below poverty level	18.7	7.5	10.1	7.2
Percent urban	47.3	58.6	64.1	56.3
Public higher education appropriation per student equivalent (1986)	$ 2,525	$ 3,390	–	–
Teachers' average salaries (1986)	$18,442	$21,690	–	–
Percent black	35.2	1.4	–	–

Sources: United States Census of Population, 1980, *General Social and Economic Characteristics*, volumes for *Mississippi* and *Iowa*, Tables 56, 57, 62, 66, 71, 76, and 82. *Number of Inhabitants*, volumes for *Mississippi* and *Iowa*, Table 1. *Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1987*, pp. xx, xxii. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1983 and 1986.

[a] Population 25 or more years old. Includes those completing college.

[b] Population 25 or more years old.

teaching takes place, the advantage will be compounded. There is strong evidence that extending the school year and lengthening the school day will increase learning and will reduce the difference in learning between affluent and poor. Although all students would benefit, disadvantaged students would benefit most because they have the most to gain (Heyns, 1978; Alexander, et al. 1985). All of these and other potentially useful measures require more money. Administrative and school consolidation, on the other hand, could save money. Mississippi has 152 school districts but only 82 counties. Many counties have two or more school districts.

Demands for increased spending to improve public education in Mississippi are met with a plea of poverty. An educational enhancement package such as BEST (Better Education for Success Tomorrow) is enacted into law but not funded. Yet, paradoxically, 81 % of the respondents in a statewide poll declared that public schools are in need of greater funding, while the need for greater funding of colleges was agreed to by 72%. Forty-five percent believe that school taxes are too low (Howell and Cosby, 1988: 58, 119).

Being unable or unwilling to afford better schools foreordains the state to poverty, the condition that gives rise to the demand for improvement and to the depreciation of schools that erodes support for them. If there is not a will to break out of this vicious circle by investing in long-term solutions, poverty will be assured and prosperity will be a vain hope. We will have done it to ourselves.

Education alone will not produce economic prosperity. Society must provide incentives and rewards for engaging in activities that promote its economic progress, a lesson amply illustrated by the Soviet experience. In addition, conditions specific to a locality influence job creation in it.[4] Yet in the absence of an educated population meaningful growth will not occur. Education is a necessary, although not a sufficient condition, for economic development. States and nations that fail to invest in it do so at their own risk.

[4] High educational levels do not necessarily produce higher employment in rural areas. "The mix of local industries, local labor costs and location can all affect employment growth." (Killian, 1991).

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